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**Renewable Resource Management, Decentralization
and Localization in the Sahel: The
Case of Afforestation**

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I. Introduction

The problem of deforestation and its consequent environmental degradation is one of the thorniest facing third and fourth world nations, and one of the toughest for international development agencies. The gradual, and apparently inexorable, cutting of the world's forests is an ecological disaster in the making. Substantial research demonstrates that deforestation of dry lands and hillside areas causes erosion, declining productivity, siltation of water supplies, increased population pressure on remaining lands, and finally, desertification. One study estimated that 14 million acres of arable lands are lost each year to the spreading deserts.¹ The impact of these events is, furthermore, upon the poorest rural dwellers. This is because the rural poor generally work these low quality and marginal lands to begin with, and draw heavily on what natural resources they do have. Thus already low incomes drop as land deteriorates, and the number of landless grows as many small producers are driven permanently from these lands.² Both for normative and operational reasons, their conditions and priorities must be carefully considered in the development of forestation policies and programs.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss in some detail the problems associated with utilizing a strategy of decentralization and localization in response to the deforestation crisis, particularly in the Sahel. The paper will consider these problems from the perspective of the locality and the central government and will explore possible solutions to these problems.

The impetus toward decentralization and localization to strengthen the response to deforestation grows out of an understanding of the dynamics of

the social and economic forces which have caused pressure on woodland resources to grow, and out of recent experiences with other approaches. These have been discussed in detail elsewhere, and will only be reviewed here.³

II. The Dilemma

The question of decentralizing and localizing afforestation efforts arises because of several characteristics of woodland usage, particularly in the Sahel:

--the combination of growing population pressure and competing and often mutually destructive land uses has placed a finite natural resource under serious pressure;

--the future provision and current consumption of this resource is not easily privatized because of customary open access practices and attendant social pressures, the cost of protecting private wood stocks, the absence of clear rules supporting such property rights, and the absence of mechanisms to redress grievances pertaining to violation of what rights there may be;

--the combination of the above patterns means that individual rural dwellers have no incentive to develop new supplies, nor to refrain from use of existing supplies; indeed, as forest areas begin to deteriorate, the strongest incentive to each individual actor is to intensify his use of the resource;

--some form of collective restraint is therefore required so that a planned distribution of woodland resources which protects and renews the woodland and makes them available for the sustained and careful use of all may be substituted for individualized scrambling which destroys woodland resources;

--centrally based regulation of the resource has been tried in the Sahel in the past, during colonial regimes and under independence, and has generally failed;

--this failure has been because of the difficulty of regulating access to and use of a large and open area, because the local populace perceived government actions as authoritarian and exclusionary, and because the absence of local support for collective restraint encouraged corruption of the local agents of national ministries.

Briefly, the pressures on existing woodland resources in the Sahel are such that the common stock is rapidly being depleted. Indeed, some analysts believe that the woodlands ought to be regarded as a sort of ecologically balanced "capital stock" which, if once consumed even only in part, will lose the ability to replenish itself. Second, the "public good" character of these woodlands is such that privatization is not an effective (or at least not an available) remedy. Third, local organizations have generally not been utilized in attempting to restrain demand, while national bureaucracies have proven ineffective and, in some cases, counter-productive.⁴

It is important for several reasons to emphasize that the destruction of woodlands in the Sahel is not usually a product of isolated individuals' pursuit of wealth. Were this the case, terminating their activity and stabilizing the woodlands would be a far easier task, as community pressure would terminate the behavior, or support national efforts to do so. Instead, it is the use of wood by the community in general for cooking fires, fencing, housing, foraging and the like which is overwhelming this resource. It is therefore not a "deviant" actor who must be restrained and sanctioned from consuming far more than he needs, but an entire community which must decrease

its consumption of some of the basic necessities of already meager lives. It is because of this and because the State as an external actor has been unable to restrain these communities that it may be assumed there are two prerequisites to any change in the condition of wood resources:

-local users must agree to act together to restrain themselves and their consumption of wood; and,

-parallel actions must be taken to increase the supply of or diminish the demand for wood products.

Community Support: It is extremely unlikely that the Sahelian states would have the police or political power to coerce communities into reducing or changing their patterns of wood consumption. Indeed, several governments have attempted to regulate local behavior in support of conservation for some time, but have generally been unsuccessful.⁵ Instead the predictable outcome has been the corruption of field agents who sell extra-legal "licenses" to local dwellers who cut and consume wood as they had been doing before the promulgation of the rules. The problem grows out of the absence of local support for restraint as advocated by regulations, and weaknesses in the supervisory capacity of the bureaucratic hierarchy. To surmount this it is the community itself which must decide to change the local norms, and which must act to enforce these revised norms. No rules are likely to succeed without local normative support, and any agent would find it difficult to enforce them against deviants (given the dispersed character of the woodlands) without parallel community support. In other words, the community must consciously internalize the externalities of wood usage, and then consciously enforce rules which reduce the scale of the internalized externalities.

Alternative Resources: Because of the critical role played by wood resources in the lives of rural dwellers, it is extremely unlikely a purely "regulatory" approach could develop such deep and widespread community support. Rather, programs must be adopted and actions taken to reduce demand and/or expand production. While this is self-evident and barely worth noting for obvious reasons, it is also important for an additional reason: it is imperative to join a community program which demonstrably improves wood supplies to the call to community self-restraint. Demonstration of the "positive" payoffs of community cooperation is probably necessary to persuade individuals to accept some measure of collective restraint in avoiding "negative" payoffs through community cooperation. This is especially evident when one recalls that in an unstable world with extremely limited information, the benefits and costs of the present are clear, but benefits and costs of an indefinite "long-run" are always problematic. An example of a program which makes clearer immediate or near payoffs might be small-catchment basins combined with aggressive research for and planting of rapidly developing tree species.⁶

III. Decentralization and Localization

If the above discussion is valid, and the commitment of local communities to norms of self-restraint and their involvement in programs of resource expansion are prerequisites to resolving the problem of woodlands in the Sahel, then the decentralization of bureaucratic functions and the localization of responsibility and initiative are essential. Specifically, nationally oriented and internationally supported programs have often been accused of several failings.⁷ These could be summarized under the headings: flexibility, speed, cost, mobilization and relevance.

Flexibility: A program which effectively addresses a variety of ecological, economic, social and political problems and resources is an obvious necessity. In any country, existant wood resources may range from plentiful to nonexistent; local economic and social conditions may vary dramatically in income, number of landless, and extent of land pressure; local political institutions may be moribund, vital or mixed; and the variety of experiences with centrally based programs in the past may have colored a locality's orientation toward new "development" programs from open to hostile. The basic problem with most hierarchical/centrally based programs is that the scale of activity is so large and the cost of analysis and differentiation among such characteristics is so high, that a highly flexible strategy utilizing a variety of tactics is not possible. Centralized management generally requires categorization, systematization and routinization. All these, particularly in programs which attempt broad (geographically), and deep (distance from headquarters) coverage, are biases toward inflexibility. Indeed, the irony is that the same dynamics of distance, space and uncertainty which make flexibility imperative tend to make officials seek greater hierarchical control, and lead to a less flexible organization.

Speed: The need to refer decisions up a lengthy chain, and the tendency for national offices to be clogged with such requests tend to slow actions by centralized bureaucracies in developing countries. This is particularly troublesome when bureaucracies are working in conditions of great uncertainty, when information costs are high, and when technological underdevelopment makes information leakage high. Bureaucrats are caught in a double bind: because of these factors, field personnel are reluctant

to commit themselves without headquarter's support, and headquarter's personnel often cannot adequately evaluate proposed actions with the information they do have available. Finally, managerial and organizational skills tend to accumulate at the center, leaving as field personnel those least able to administer complex local problems efficiently and quickly.⁸

Cost: The centralized/hierarchical approach is probably the least cost effective one available to the concerned states. Civil service pay scales, the costs of gathering and disseminating necessary information, of making centralized decisions, of supporting logistical needs in the rural areas, etc., are all excessive. Historically, third and fourth world States have been unable to meet these costs, and have resolved the dilemma by having "paper" extension services, or by simply failing to gather information, make decisions and provide logistical support to their field personnel.⁹ The "overhead" cost of the central "directorates" are equally high, and tend to be paid before the field expenses. The outcome is too often nonexistent or demoralized field personnel, and national offices which are busy, but engaged in meaningless tasks. Even where central agencies have attempted to utilize low-cost, minimally trained village dwellers in place of costly civil service appointees, logistical, planning and informational support has been inadequate; sometimes nonexistent.¹⁰ To these costs must be added the opportunity costs paid because of ineffective and irrelevant program decisions, and the decision costs inherent in large and dispersed organizations.

Relevance: Centralized/hierarchical programs suffer from irrelevance to local needs and opportunities in two ways. First, because of the sheer distance between central program development and supervision and the specific needs of localities, tailoring programs to those needs is difficult

to accomplish. Even more difficult, however, is bridging the distance between the political-economy of life in the capitol and life in the rural areas. The unfortunate reality of bureaucratic life in most developing areas is that the actors who dispense rewards and sanctions which determine the terms of survival of the bureaucracy and its members are political actors at the capitol, and are rarely the rural consumers of services.¹¹ What this means is that programs, area priorities, the specifics of policies, personnel assignment, etc. are subsidiary to competition within and among the bureaucracies for scarce resources, including very survival. While this is to some extent true in all governments, the political powerlessness of rural dwellers in developing areas means there are no countervailing pressures. Sporadic and erratic programs, personnel instability, logistical failure, and favoritism among areas may in some measure be traced to this political economy. Local costs and benefits, which could be important incentives in these programs, are relevant often only as obstacles to centrally drawn bargains which define areas of activity, priorities, strategies and even the tactical specifics of programs to be implemented at the locality.

Mobilization: As indicated in the analysis of the forestation dilemma, local support of conservation/expansion programs is essential to provide community self-restraint and sustained attention to the details of developing new production. While exhortations to "participation" are nearly commonplace in development literature, they often do not grapple with the commitment to local control implied by these goals.¹² Specifically, the crux of the problem is achieving local commitment to comprehensive programs. But how is this commitment to develop? Too often the approach has been one of symbolic participation in programs essentially designed at national or regional levels. Such participation is rarely sustained by local residents long or intensely

enough to achieve lasting results. This is in part because these efforts rarely utilize community "political" institutions to define rules and to make commitments to programs the community understands and supports. The political process, defined as a process by which concerned members debate, argue, negotiate, bargain, etc., until either resolution or stalemate is achieved, must be activated, stimulated, and allowed to work before any real regulation and development of this "public good" can be achieved. Locally supported rules must be found and defined, as must be locally viable mechanisms of enforcing these rules. This puts the force of community behind the program, and allows for rules to develop and change as people begin to apply and live with them.¹³ Central programs cannot do this because they already have defined "appropriate/model" programs. They have set cost/benefit parameters, logistical limitations, procedural rules, etc., and are rarely able to adapt to local conditions, both supportive and problematic. While these definitions are sometimes for socially laudable or technically justifiable ends, they also stifle development of community-based programs. Central authority must confront the real need to "let go" of its control, and accept local mistakes and waste in the interest of longer-term local mobilization and commitment to local programs. The virtue of community initiated and designed programs is that local participants are involved in norms and rules which they can support. Even where no viable (vis-a-vis forestation) rules/norms can be defined, one at least avoids wasting resources in programs based on specious assumptions. Furthermore, a discussion process has been initiated which may lead to effective rules in the future. In summary, the recent history of rural development programs suggests that basic-needs, small-scale, community-oriented programs are unlikely to last beyond the time of external assistance when they are not undergirded by genuine local support and thus do not conform

to local norms and cost/benefit parameters.

IV. Implementing Decentralization and Localization

This paper has advocated a forestation/wood resources management strategy which would decentralize administration and localize responsibility to the rural dwellers who live with the problem of deforestation. This is not because this strategy is seen as panacea, but because the possibly unique dynamics of this and similar ecologically sensitive public goods, under great and community-wide pressure, create a vicious circle which is not easily broken without flexible, speedy, low cost, locally relevant and locally supported programs impossible in highly centralized administrative systems. Nonetheless, implementing such a decentralized and localized program is at best problematic.

A basic problem with any type of decentralized reform is that nearly all (all?) organizational support systems in developing areas are completely centralized.¹⁴ Logistics; transportation; information-collection, analysis and dissemination; planning and budgeting; personnel development and management; research and development, all tend largely to be run from the center, organized around central priorities and concerns, and oriented toward central accountability and rewards. While an appealing strategy would be to disavow all need and interest in support from such central agencies, that is probably not operationally realistic, at least in the foreseeable future. Localities will need technical analyses of land capacity, research and development of better and more quickly developing tree/shrub species, and specialists to help develop optimal strategies to mix species, to advise on the utilization and utilize and expansion of local water resources, and to assist in improvement of land management practices. Supplies unobtainable

in the rural areas must be procured and transported, technical personnel must be appropriately trained and posted, and local "plans" must be integrated into the national planning systems which have become institutionalized into third/fourth world political cultures. If it is assumed that a substantial empowerment of local communities will still require external assistance, how can the structures which provide such assistance be manipulated to articulate their services to the localities rather than their central directorates? Additionally what incremental steps may be taken to begin to diminish the dependence of rural personnel on central support structures?

It is virtually self-evident that no single model will be sufficient to meet the needs of the diverse states facing such renewable resource problems. Perhaps the only generalization which may be made with some confidence is that proposals recommending sweeping reforms are unlikely to be successful or even useful as reference points for third and fourth world leaders. Such reforms presume a centralization of political power vis-a-vis strong (as interest groups) bureaucracies which is generally unrealistic. If too rapidly implemented, they endanger the already weak administrative system with changes of scale and magnitude which could break down what capacity there already exists. The experience of India with the Panchyats in the 1950's is certainly instructive in this regard.¹⁵ The delicate balance between limited skills and tasks within various bureaus would be threatened, and the demands to disperse (under decentralization) many of those with skills to rural areas would at best tax civil service numbers, and almost certainly lead to at least passive resistance. Furthermore, vested interests which have grown up between bureaus and private contractors, among bureaus, and among bureaucrats would be threatened.

One might expect natural resistance to such disruption. More importantly, perhaps, continued stable operation of national affairs depends on some continuity among such relationships.¹⁶

Finally, rural personnel generally lack the training to handle an abrupt expansion of duties. This is exacerbated by administrative "technologies" injected by third and fourth world states, which are usually complex and personnel and skill intensive. For example, the American administrative contribution to developing areas has too often been complex systems of pre- and post-auditing (requiring trained auditors), involved systems of comprehensive planning (requiring planners, cost-benefit analysts, economists, and computer specialists), detailed personnel classification systems (requiring lengthy, formal systems of recruitment and training, and expensive and cumbersome commissions and boards), complex and lengthy requirements for reporting information by field service personnel, and the like. Such a technological bias permeates third/fourth world elites, and can usually be supported (if at all) only at the center. It affects rural personnel by displacing substantive service activity with office work, and by reinforcing their dependence on centrally based support organizations.¹⁷

In summary, third/fourth world administrative systems are ill-prepared to transfer substantial responsibilities to rural areas, and rural areas are ill-prepared to accept these responsibilities.

If one is skeptical of "peasant revolution" strategies, whether because of the difficulty of organizing such disparate and dispersed groups, because of the difficulty of institutionalizing local/rural control over urban cities in any meaningful long-term, or because of the sheer momentum developed by centrally-based organizations, a more incremental approach to the problem may be, by default, the only viable strategy. It becomes one of incentives

and procedural changes; of affecting the "rig of the game" so that these systems face claims from rural areas which they have an incentive to attend, so that they are able and inclined to respond, and so that rural areas have greater skills and resources to attend to their own needs.

There are a number of steps which could be pursued in the current third/fourth world context which might be expected to expand the capacity of rural personnel, strengthen "appropriate administrative technology," integrate local with national planning systems, avoid disrupting national bureaucratic relationships while strengthening local accountability of field personnel, and identify and design projects with minimal draw on national resources. These changes/reforms do presume some measure of national-level support for reaching the rural poor, though not necessarily one of "revolutionary" dimensions. Indeed, because of the reactionary forces a "revolutionary" commitment may generate, a lower-key approach may be more successful over the long run.¹⁸

A. Personnel capacity: The capacity of primary service delivery personnel can be demonstrably improved by relatively low cost and minimally disruptive management training programs. Two joint USAID-Ghanaian projects have recently been implemented and evaluated by outside teams which found evidence of demonstrable improvement in basic managerial ability.¹⁹ This included such areas as personnel management, self-management, task definition, work-plan development, simple budgeting and accounting, program design and management, and local community relations. Among agricultural extension personnel, this was accomplished by four three week periods of training spread out over four years, and performed at a low-cost agricultural management institute. Equally encouraging results were obtained in a similar program in Ghana aimed at cross-sector management training at the district (local) government level. Awareness and employment of basic management skills

increased substantially along with substantially improved cross-sectoral communication and coordination at the district level. In each case the cost and time away from jobs was minimal, and the programs have been entirely Ghananized and continued.

Personnel in the field can also be strengthened by changing established principles of recruitment. In his major study of agricultural extension in Kenya, David Leonard found that personnel without secondary school certificates were more effective as primary service deliverers because their expectations of remuneration and advancement were more realistic than their better trained peers. They were more satisfied with their jobs and more committed and motivated in delivering field services. The two groups, however, were found to be equally technically capable.²⁰ Thus, scaling down the recruitment requirements may help identify cadres of equally able but more committed and less costly rural workers.

Field personnel also desperately need relief from overwhelming reporting requirements. Robert Chambers in his study of field services in East Africa found service personnel trapped in their offices a majority of the time by reporting requirements. Complementing the sheer bulk of requirements is the complexity of systems of inventoring and accounting for supplies, evaluating personnel and reporting on project/program performance. These requirements often strain if not exceed the technical capacity of service delivery personnel. But new and simplified systems to keep and report records can be devised. Chambers has suggested one system which both simplifies paper work and stimulates field personnel to get in the field.²¹ "Technoserve," a private voluntary organization working in Kenya and other areas, has developed a simplified system of accounting which they have demonstrated can be kept by anyone literate.²² A similar program was employed in the USAID-

Government of Senegal joint Basic Health Services Project with definite success.²³

The reality is that third world governments can keep field records, gather information and manage field personnel with less costly, less complex and less centralized management systems. Such mechanisms are being developed and utilized, and only need to be supported and adopted further. While their utilization will not, of itself, eliminate the centripital forces which dominate these countries, they can ease the dependence of field personnel on central support agencies, and increase the capacity of field personnel to perform field services. This in turn would remove a major impediment from dispersing authority to rural personnel and expanding the role of local communities.

Field personnel, finally need to be more closely integrated into subjects chosen for formal research as well as results achieved by such research. As Leonard found in Kenya and the author of this paper has seen elsewhere, the articulation between agricultural research and agricultural extension tends to be extremely weak.²⁴ Research agendas reflect the tension between more personal professional priorities and small-farmer needs, with the former usually dominant. Similarly, centralized agricultural research programs often do not reflect the complex and varying geographic characteristics found across these states. Finally, results are rarely effectively disseminated to field personnel. Improved targeting of basic research is required to expand the capacity of field personnel, and may in some measure be achieved by several structural and procedural reforms suggested below.

B. Local resources, accountability and orientation: As we have discussed, in the political economy which determines the fate of rural

development in general and the fate of such areas as renewable resources in particular, local initiative and programs are hindered by the central orientation of service and support bureaucracies.

Theoretically, the problem can be reduced to one of coordination and exchange. At such levels as the Circle and District in Francophone and Anglophone Africa, there is rarely any effective mechanism to coordinate either demand for or delivery of services, nor are there sufficient resources available to enable localities to bargain effectively with actors based at more central locations. Until localities are able to articulate a schedule of needs and to bargain for their delivery, there is little likelihood administrative systems will evolve from their preoccupation with the center.²⁵

Regardless of where one works in West and East Africa, a number of complaints seem to be commonplace in rural development: supplies, monies, authorizations do not arrive on time (if at all); personnel posted to rural areas are incompletely trained, poorly motivated, and rarely work with the personnel of parallel but different agencies; central plans and budgets are late, arbitrary, do not reflect local conditions, priorities, needs and requests; and changing decisions made at regional or national levels is, if not administratively impossible, at least cumbersome and expensive enough to be effectively impossible.²⁶

In some measure, many of these complaints can be eased by procedural reforms which expand the authority and responsibilities of cross-sectoral officers. Most of these reforms, incidentally, have been adopted in one developing state or another, with varying success. They include reforms in personnel placement and evaluation, interactive systems of planning and budgeting, expansion of key technical resources at the districts, flexible modes of project design and implementation, "district" focused programs of

organizational and personnel development, and improving the career lines for district officials.²⁷ Once again, some measure of central commitment to rural development is presumed; however, not necessarily a revolutionary one.

The key to this strategy's success however is more problematic. It lies in expanding the resources of rural personnel as one expands their responsibilities. Administration is, of course, an intrinsically political process. If ones' goal is to alter the point of decision-making, one must be prepared to alter the distribution of politically relevant resources so that the "new" decision makers are able to implement their responsibilities. This, of course, is the major intellectual challenge in this task.

Generalist/spatially-oriented officers need resources in order to participate in a political economy characterized by shortage in resources, disjunction between form and reality, and inflation in value of bureaucratic position. Specifically, plans and budgets are authoritative but formalistic;²⁸ formal logistical systems have frequently completely broken down;²⁹ and civil services are more often than not complex systems of patron-client relationships, performing important political/social distributive functions along factional, regional and ethnic lines.³⁰ The disruption of domestic economies, in some cases by severe inflation, furthermore, has destroyed the economic viability of purely market rewards to manage and operate these systems; salaries are utterly infeasible for economic survival, budget allocations are ludicrous, and supplies often cannot be purchased at any price. It is clearly not a picture in which one can purpose a simple structural "public administration" reform.

In his controversial yet powerful work on political growth and political decay, Huntington offers one analytical framework to make sense of this political and administrative breakdown. Huntington presented a rather grim scenario where he postulated a revolution of "rising expectations"

which would mobilize urban and eventually rural masses to pursue such intense demands that political institutions would "decay" and political stability would break down. His analysis is accurate in that political decay has certainly occurred. For example, the "praetorian" systems he described have become the rule in much of Africa. However, the cause of this in Africa does not appear to be mass mobilization, but its opposite. What seems to have happened, at least in much of Africa, was that regimes folded into themselves as general participation shrank and all types of resources mobilized into the public arena diminished; the last reinforced the entire process and the capacity and institutionalization of the regimes diminished. Following Huntington's analysis, the result has been "archaic" political systems where privileged elites monopolize static or shrinking resources and do little else but hold power.³¹

There are two possibilities in trying to deal with this: the grim one is that the social/political/economic resource base is indeed constant or shrinking, bureaucratic elites will continue to be preoccupied primarily with mere survival, and that there may indeed be no way out of the box. The alternative is to consider how new resources may be mobilized into the political economy to "deflate" the value of bureaucratic "place" and reactivate a political market where viable exchanges can occur between service providers and service recipients, and where the latter have some effective sanctions to deal with or short-circuit formalistic plans, ineffective logistical systems and worthless personnel.³²

All this is relevant to the problem of the district officer and renewable resource management in two ways: first it has been argued that the peasant societies contain resources not mobilized into the modern economy and polity.³³ It is precisely these resources which if mobilized might revitalize bureaucracies by increasing their resources and changing the cost calculus of action/inaction. Second, if mobilized through local

personnel, they would provide them the resources to bargain with those central planning, budgeting, logistical and personnel systems with which they must deal.

C. Rural mobilization and development:

Many theories of rural mobilization have, of course, been advanced. They include the peasant revolutionary experiences of Asia, the political "awakening" described by analysts of African nationalism, and the psychological/social-identity theories of scholars as Deutsch.³⁴

Most recently, Owens and Shaw in Development Reconsidered, have presented an implied theory which grows from their analysis of economic and social change in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. This theory turns primarily on the process of turning "peasants" into "farmers": turning passive agriculture workers who accept near unchanging status and prospects, into active entrepreneurs participating in a growing, integrated, rural/urban economy. If we accept for discussion purposes for their premises, several conclusions follow.³⁵

First, the challenge is to stimulate and facilitate a rural mobilization such that the entire system's resource base has grown. Second, a substantial portion of these resources must flow through local entities, so that their bargaining power is enhanced, and the urban-centered political economy is altered. Several suggestions will be very briefly made to illustrate the problem:

Macro-economic policy: In a variety of ways the domestic terms of trade are serious disadvantages for African agriculturalists. Farm product prices may be depressed in order to hold down urban food costs, to earn foreign exchange, to mobilize import consumption, or simply to fund government treasuries.³⁶ Regardless of the motive, the results are the same; incentives

for rural farmers to participate in the modern economy are reduced, production is diminished, and rural areas and dwellers are stripped of resources with which they could develop their rural areas and could bargain with central actors.³⁷ Changing such policies will not be easy. But it is necessary.

Micro-development projects: Even when macro-level policies are adverse to rural development, locally oriented projects have demonstrably improved the productive capacity of rural areas and increased the resources available locally. Programs such as the rural roads development program supported by the World Bank and USAID in the Philippines have been found by third party evaluators to have substantially increased and diversified agricultural production by radically slashing farm-to-market costs and improving frequency of transportation. Evaluation found definite growth among existing and new small businesses in the road areas, increased school attendance and increased participation by rural dwellers in social affairs in nearby towns. These all-weather, secondary roads were built and maintained entirely by local firms and governments.³⁸

While the rural roads program of the Philippines may be an exceptionally and unusually successful program, rural development projects which attempt to expand the supply of credit to agricultural procedures, improve market access, strengthen supplies of agricultural commodities, develop small scale irrigation systems and so forth, have had their success as well. Many have been hampered by an incomplete understanding of the local rural economy, poor management, inadequate resources, etc. Nonetheless, well-targeted, well managed micro-development efforts can increase rural incomes anywhere from a few to several hundred percent. It is potentially a key component of a strategy to reconstruct a political economy through rural development. In large measures the economic "miracles" of Taiwan and

South Korea can be traced to careful pursuit of both macro and micro-level rural development strategies.³⁹ Of course, increased rural incomes must be captured at the local level and spent there to avoid perpetuating the existing political economy at simply a more lucrative level.

D. Procedural and institutional reform: There are numerous changes in procedure and practice which can help capture these resources at the local, rural level, and can open up the administrative system for greater local influence. These deal primarily with strengthening the role of the district/circle offices in general administration, and with strengthening local revenue collection. Neither is without risk, but each holds promise as well.

Ideally, one would not strengthen an administrative official as a mechanism of strengthening community control. District or Circle officers are, of course, each part of their own national bureaucracies, and thus have interests differing from the local community and participate in their own, centrally-oriented political economies. However, rarely have local communities any viable alternative to participate in the bureaucratic arena. Furthermore, the interests of district personnel (as claimants on service and support bureaucracies) place them in potential alliance with the localities. The last factor can be heightened to the degree that district personnel are held responsible and rewarded for development project performance in their districts. Finally, although their areas of responsibility are somewhat larger than rural economic, social and traditional political units, they are once again the "only game in town." It is to them, therefore, one must turn to begin to counterpose locality to center.

District personnel responsibilities and authority can be expanded in several areas already mentioned. For example, consider personnel placement, training and promotion.

The typical rural administrative unit includes a general administrative officer (district officer) several support offices (accounting, purchasing, planning, engineering, personnel), and several service offices (agriculture, social welfare, health, community development, education, forestation, irrigation, public works, mining, etc.). Typically each officer is selected and trained at the center, assigned from the center, and evaluated, re-trained and promoted by his technical service superiors at the regional or central level. His pay, allowances, perquisites, program budgets and personnel opportunities all flow from and through the technical service. It is not difficult to deduce from this where his attention will be focused in program development, administrative performance, information dissemination, and policy conformity. All the incentives he faces focuses his attention "upward." Not only are there few rewards from the local community, the general administrative officer, or his peers in other ministries, but involvement in their programs can distract and deflect him from the priorities of his own ministry. In short there is little reason to expect integrated and multi-sectoral definitions or solutions to local problems.

Central ministries in unitary states are obviously not going to devolve their responsibilities wholesale to localities or districts. And there are probably some good reasons why they ought not, including genuine concerns about professional development, interregional equity, rational planning, etc. However, the current situation is one where local and cross-sectional concerns have little or no legal authority to participate in these decisions.

General administrative officers can become part of the personnel evaluation process. A dual evaluation system shared between technical superiors and district officers might be one feasible option. Professional development programs, some funded by international donors, have been instituted at the district level, emphasizing identification of local problems,

team design and management of projects, and joint budget and planning exercises.⁴⁰ Such programs can be expanded, placed in the district officers office, and used as criteria for financial increments and promotion. Finally, initial personnel placements and reappointments can be made subject to district officer sign-off. While none of these suggestions really overturns the current technically orientated personnel system, they open it to participation by generalist personnel; they increase its scope to include a spatial or lateral "dimension", and thereby adjust the reward system incrementally.

Planning and budgeting is a second area where the role of general administrative personnel and spatial and cross-sectoral emphases of rural development needs to be expanded. While a number of states have instituted nominal "bottom-up" planning systems, the reality remains that central service ministries compete at the center for limited resources, and then apportion their shares according to their internal concerns. "Input" from rural areas is rarely coupled with this process. Still more removed from these essentially political dynamics are nominal national "planning" ministries. Even in countries with apparent strong ideological commitment to peasant-based planning coupled with apparently strong leadership commitment to such planning, centralized control remains the norm.⁴¹

"Interactive" planning systems are difficult to implement. Numerous actors at different levels must keep to careful timetables for making relatively reasonable proposals. Budgetary prospects, constrained technical resources, and rural areas each with virtually unlimited and real needs must somehow be coordinated such that at the end of the planning year a realistic, equitable, relatively economically optimal, and politically acceptable plan exists. One must ask, can it be done?

The incentive for rural areas is to ask for as much as they can conceive of; for technical ministries, it is to commit as little as possible. The likely result is that planning and budget personnel are inundated with unrefined demands from rural areas, and limited information from recalcitrant ministerial personnel.⁴² On its face, and considering problems experienced in Africa and elsewhere in the third world, such a strategy may not be viable.

While there are several alternatives under experiment across the third world, to one degree or another all are based on expanding the resources directly at the command of the local, spatial unit.⁴³ That unit (province, district, etc.) then is able to choose local projects of highest concern, and "purchase" commodities and skills through locally appointed civil servants, private contractors, international donors, or community action. These include systems analogous to the American grant-in-aid approach, the expansion of local revenue sources, setting proportions of national budgets as local "development funds", or monies targeted at selected areas by international donors. In most cases, substantial planning requirements are made of local entities before they receive these funds, but once received, they are subjected to local administration and management. Essentially, the locality is allowed to enter the political economy on its own and compete for resources according to local priorities. This is far less elegant or complete than complex and comprehensive interactive planning systems, but perhaps more viable as well. National ministries, of course, maintain their functions alongside these activities. And as a short-run technical and political compromise, this may be optimal.

Implied by this discussion of planning are two additional areas: technical expertise and project design. In the first case the capacity of district officers can be expanded substantially by shifting officers with primarily support responsibilities (accounting, purchasing, inspection,

planning, project design, engineering) into their office and under his control.⁴⁴ In some key areas, resource shortages make it difficult to provide fully-trained representatives to each spatial entity. In these cases, placing what personnel as are available under the district officer will at least remove another administrative competitor from the district; expansion of "appropriate administrative technologies" such as those developed by Technoserve (see above) will help fill the gaps. As much as anything, generalist personnel need staff resources: to act as their eyes and ears, to interact and bargain with service personnel under central control, to prepare proposals for local projects, to help wage bureaucratic battle with regional and national authorities, to help communicate with local leaders and concerns, and the like. A generalist without a staff to develop and marshall his local/spatial arguments and perspectives is at a probably fatal disadvantage when dealing with central, technical ministries and their local representatives.⁴⁵

With expanded technical resources, it becomes possible to argue district officers could prepare project proposals and designs within certain defined parameters. For example, through agreements made between national governments and international donors, parameters for secondary roads projects could be defined. As proposals were submitted for such roads, by districts and found consistent with these parameters, approval would be automatic and disbursement of funds could go directly to the local administrative unit.⁴⁶ There is no theoretical reason why this could not be broadened from internationally financed programs to domestically funded development priorities. In the case of construction projects, fairly reliable methods of controlling corruption and fund "leakage" were developed in several Asian countries where USAID has worked.

The point of this section of the paper is to illustrate a number of procedural changes which expand the ability of the district, or other spatially based officer, to bargain with centrally-based and "vertically-oriented" bureaucracies. As emphasized earlier, however, it is all too likely that these "reforms" will be as formalistic as much administration is in developing countries unless the total of resources in the system can be expanded, and unless a large portion of them are expended in the rural areas by rurally-oriented and based entities. The latter implies a significant upgrading of the tax capacity of rural institutions. Property taxes, market fees, public facility user fees, local enterprises, etc. must be aggressively pursued. This is a formidable task, hindered by the weakness of true local, popular institutions; traditions of paternalism at the center; and natural distrust by rural dwellers experienced to corruption, mismanagement and to supporting a privileged urban class.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has argued that the dynamics of renewable resources management in the Sahel, particularly of the woodlands, makes community based and central programs particularly critical. However, current administrative systems in most African states are highly centralized and are part of political economies where resources available for rural to make claims upon central technical services are minimal. It is the thesis of this paper that administrative decentralization is an essential prerequisite for effective resource management in rural areas.

The dilemma is, of course, how to attain such decentralization. This paper has argued that a three part strategy might accomplish such an end. The first emphasizes development of appropriate administrative technology for rural areas, further development of the capacity of existing rural

administrative capacity. Second, it has argued that a sustained program of general rural and agricultural development is necessary to revitalize bureaucracies in developing areas, and to place resources in the rural areas with which they might redefine the urban-centered political economy. Third, and finally, it has presented a list of specific reforms in structure and procedure which, if coupled with expanding the rural resource base, would add a spatially and rurally oriented dimension to the development and implementation of public policy. With rural personnel strengthened, resources expanded, and technical ministries more rurally and spatially oriented, rural communities may have the resources and assistance necessary for them to realize they can and must define and manage their lives, communities and resources.

Is any of this realistic? I would not argue that urban/administrative elites are unaware of their power bases, nor unable to defend them. Certainly if broached directly, national-level political resistance will be significant and probably successful. Yet most regimes are not monolithic. There are ministries, and personnel and sections within ministries, genuinely concerned with national development. Not all decisions are examined for all possible policy ramifications by all interested parties; and there are personnel concerned enough with solving specific problems to accept some implicit systemic risks. The challenge is for those genuinely concerned with rural progress to accomplish development in this context. To this end, an incremental, positive-sum, and programatically-oriented approach to decentralization may be required. Specifically:

-- power at the subnational level must be created by mobilizing popular resources rather than by obviously reducing resources available to

nationally based actors;

-- proposed reforms and development projects must provide tangible, useful services to national officials and institutions and local residents, in order to build a basis for future quid pro quo exchanges;

-- proposed reforms and development projects must fill existing needs or gaps rather than attempt to supplant and/or disrupt existing structures;

-- proposed reforms and development projects ought to stress their instrumental value in support of agreed upon sector or sub-sector programs and goals.

The prospects for administrative decentralization and localization are crucial for a variety of reasons. Development practitioners see it as an administrative reform to support and encourage resource management and growth in the hinterland; many political-economists see it as an essential component of any strategy to redistribute political influence and power from small, urban elites in the capital cities; finally, those committed to a broader, humanistic concept of personal and social development see it as absolutely necessary to the development of individuals' social and political capacities. Given the realities of dealing in policy and with institutions and elites, however, the task will probably be a delicate and incremental process of small steps and small reforms. These will only be accomplished as they are justified to current power holders and policy makers on specific, programatic and technical grounds.

Footnotes

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- 3) James T. Thomson, "How Much Wood Would a Peasant Plant?", Public Choice Analysis of Institutional Constraints on Firewood Production Strategies in the West African Sahel (Department of Law and Government, Lafayette College, Easton, Pa: 1980, mimeo). Also see, Thomson, "Trouble Case Investigation of a Problem in Nigerian Rural Modernization: Forest Conservation"; Studies in Political Theory and Policy Analysis (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Public Policy Workshop, 1973).
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- 5) Ibid, pp. 9-14.
- 6) For example, the Oxfam Micro-catchment Project in Quahigouga, Upper Volta.
- 7) Dennis Rondinelli and Marcus D. Ingle, Improving the Implementation of Development Programs: Beyond Administrative Reform (Practical Concepts Incorporated, Washington, D.C.: 1980, mimeo).
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15) Akhter Hameed Khan, "Ten Decades of Rural Development: Lessons from India", MSU Rural Development Papers (East Lansing, Michigan: 1978).

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18) James S. Wunsch, "Decentralization, An Operational Perspective" (Presented at the Third Annual Conference on the Third World, Omaha, Nebraska: October, 1979; mimeo).

19) The Agricultural Management Development Project, (Accra, 1979) and The Economic Rural Development Management Project; (Accra, 1980) Each evaluation is available from the Office of Evaluations Africa Bureau, USAID, Washington, D.C.

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22) Personal communication with Dr. David K. Leonard, June, 1980.

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45) Ibid.

46) This in fact was the method employed in the Rural Roads Project in the Philippines. Post-project auditing by third parties indicated little resource leakage had occurred.